

Interview with Gabrielle DeMoras

Conducted by James Myall

Transcribed by Brianna Anctil

(00:01-00:12) JM: This is an oral history interview with Gabrielle DeMoras. This is James Myall and the date today is June 11th 2014. And we're here at her apartment at the Marcotte Home in Lewiston.

GD: It's now called St. Mary's Residence now. They renamed it legally to be all under the same hat of Duville and St. Mary so we're all under the same hat [?]

JM: So can you start by— can you tell me what your full name was— what your maiden name was?

(00:33-00:45) GD: Well, I never got married. My name is Gabrielle Catherine Georgia DeMoras. I was named after my god parents. Catherine and George was my godfather. So they called me Catherine and Georgia after them.

JM; and what were your parent's names?

(00:49-1:45) GD: My father's name was Octave Joseph and my mother's was Alice— I don't know her middle name Lily Bellefonte. Her father came from Berlin, New Hampshire. And he was from Canada. But they came down from Canada when someone in her family got sick and he came down to visit them. And then they had what they call like [?] which was like get-togethers at each other's house and they had [?] and go in each other's house and they'd have entertainment. They'd roll up the carpet and they'd dance, and they'd sing, tell jokes and stories, pass the home brew, you know what I'm saying. And this was people meeting people, you know young men meeting young girls. And that's how my father met my mother. She played the piano and he played the violin. And so that's how they got to know each other. 'Cuz they used to go to different houses, playing instruments and that's how they met.

JM: And was your father born in the U.S. as well?

(1:50) GD: No, no, he was born in Canada. [?], Canada.

JM: That's in Quebec.

GD: Uh, I don't— I best— I imagine.

JM: And when were you born?

(2:00) GD: Me? I was born in 1935. Up in Livermore. Livermore, Maine.

JM: And what did your parents do for a living?

(2:10-5:30) GD: Well, my mother— she stayed home, I mean take care of the family. My father used to work at the paper mill up in Chisholm. He worked there for quite a few years. And my mother died in 1940. And 1940, that was a blow for my father. And then of course, after that, my grandfather was still living so he stayed home with the younger kids. And we were 8 kids left— two died— well, 1 died before me when it was born. And then, we were 8 kids and then my mother got— was pregnant at the time and she had [?] and she lost— she died— doctor took her to the hospital and they said, “well, would you like to have an abortion?” “Oh no.” She said, “I wanna keep the baby.” And so, “Can I at least have it baptized?” ‘Cuz she knew she was gonna die ‘cuz she was so sick and didn’t wanna lose the baby at all, if she could help it. I guess they tried to save both of them, but the baby lived long enough to be baptized anyway and died 2 hours later after birthing. My mother died a week later. And then after that, my father saw well, he couldn’t take care of all of us, so—because he worked swing shifts at the mill. One week was the days[?], the next week was 3 to 11, another week was 11 to 7, and so it was too much to care for kids so my aunts came from Canada, but they’re all old people. So they couldn’t stay long. They stayed a month ago. And we didn’t have working equipment to work around the house, that was the trouble. I mean, we didn’t have refrigerators and washing machines like we have now. And so they had to work awful hard for old people so they couldn’t stay. And so, after that my father said, ‘what else can I do?’ So he ended up having to put us in the orphanage. My brothers went down to Healy Asylum downtown here, and that was called Healy Terrace. They moved that into apartments also. And then my sisters and I came over here. That was a boys orphanage down there run by the nuns and they had the orphanages up here run by the nuns. So, that’s how it went. So, I was here only a year and then I went to a foster home after that. With cousins up in North Exebridge, Massachusetts. I was there about 7 years. And they came from Canada— both of them. You know, both of them, husband and wife. And I got to know pretty much of their family, on that side of the family. I used to call them my aunts and uncles, whole time we were cousins. So, I got to know that side of the family pretty good. And of course, I got stories from them because of what happened through the years. That was interesting. They used to send the [?] over their house, and you know, I’ll visit them. Sometimes we’d go visit them, quite often. ‘Cuz those days we had no TV and all that stuff, so we’d go visit each other more often, you know, that’s family. And so many of the— those ancestors on that

side of the family came down from Canada and they settled in different states. One of them— one family settled in Rhode Island. Another one was settled in Haverhill. Another one settled in North Exebridge, another— and different places like that. So, we're not together like we used to be, you know, we didn't see each other anymore, like for those [?] get-togethers and all that. We're all separated from each other. They'd come like holidays, like Christmas, or New Year's or something, but that's about the only time we saw them. Unless we go visit them ourselves. [?] All the customs that we had before kinda disappeared because we're not together to follow them anymore.

JM: So did you— do you know why your father sent you— sent the kids to Lewiston? Was that because that was where the orphanage was?

(5:40) GD: Yeah, there was no other ones around. This was the closest one to us, for us over here. Of course, some of us, like my older sister was here for a while— one of the older ones, suppose they had to work for their keep you might say, so she'd be like a receptionist or something like that plus going to school on the side. At that time, she was going to high school. So she said it was a lot of work because being a receptionist, going to school and doing your homework was a lot to do, you know.

JM: So, while she was here at the home, she worked for the nuns as well?

GD: Pardon?

JM: You mean she worked for the nuns?

(6:15-7:49) GD: Yeah, well, they might say you didn't get paid because she was working for her keep, you know. At that time. And when I was here, the orphanage that they had when they called—the girls that went there that finished high school— I heard about this, I didn't— I saw some of them, but I didn't actually got to talk to them that much. They used to put them to work at the hospital or the nursing home so that they could have some money to start their own lives with. You know, like get married or join religious life or something. So they were not actually put out on the street, they were actually doing jobs after they finished high school so they could— especially if they had no family to go home to. So those who had families to go back to, they would send them back home. Whereas, some of them would put their kids here in the orphanage, not because they were orphans, that was during the war, and they would go put them in the orphanage like a daycare center, kind of thing. And they would come get them weekends, you know, or holidays. But some, not all of us were orphans, most of us weren't orphans at all, just a few of us. So that's why when the nuns closed their doors, because after

the war was over they all went back home, you know, the families got back together, and the guys came back home, or whoever was left living. And the families kept going from there, but the mothers had to go work in the factories, so they didn't have much time to be home with the kids. So that's why the orphanage was kind of needed at the time for a place for the kids to go to while the parents were working. Sometimes, I wish I could—[unintelligible] orphanage 'cuz sometimes you're not so good— well off in foster homes, sometimes.

JM: So were you here— were you and your sisters— were you here only for during the week and got picked up for the weekends or—?

(7:58-9:05) GD: No, no! We were here for good, I mean, you know, until we could get back outta here. Until we finished school. I mean, my sisters— Agnes finished school here, but my sister, Margaret only had 1 more year to go, but that— when my father moved to Biddeford, she went home with him, and my sister went to the convent after that. And so, anyway, that's what. Then me, I went to the foster home up in North Exebridge, and my sister, Clove, who was younger than me, both of us took the train to get to the people— we were both in different foster homes, my sister Clove was in one and I was in another. And we weren't far from each other really, but far enough we couldn't walk over to each other's house, we had to get there by car, so we used to visit quite often. She used to come spend vacations with me and I'd go spend vacations with her, so I kinda grew up with her. She was next to me in line. She was one of my younger sisters so I got more attached to her 'cuz I saw her more often. The others I didn't get to see them that much so we never grew up together. We never had Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving together. I always missed that. I always did.

JM: So you went to the foster home after only a year here?

(9:09) GD: After a year here, yeah. I was 7 years old then, by the time I got out of here. We stayed home until my grandfather died and after that, when he died, everything got separated because there was nobody to take care of us after that. He got sick with something[?] and died. So that was the end of that. But my father couldn't keep us there. He had to work. There was nobody to watch us at home.

JM: So you went from the Marcotte Home, back home with your grandfather, and then after he died—?

[crosstalk]

(9:31-12:28) GD: For about a year, for about a year. After that, after that, that's when they decided what to do with the rest of us. Well, a cousin of mine took me and then the other— she

was not related to us, she was just some neighbors that my father knew up in Canada. So she had a little girl that died. She always missed her little girl so she heard that my father had my younger sister that was 4 years old at the time, and she said, 'well, I'd like to take my sister, Claudia.'" She said, 'that would be nice.' To kinda make up for the daughter she lost, you know. And that's how come she end up over there. But it just so happened that her older son, Alphonse, he fell in love with my older sister, Marcie, and then they got married. And so, I said to my sister, I used to say to her— at school she said, "My sister's marrying my brother!" [laughs] They were not at all related, you know. But anyway, this nun said, 'Oh, this is terrible! How could such a thing happen in this day and age!' And all the time they called home just to verify if it was true. And they thought it was such a big sin, you know. And of course, my cousin said to— of course they're not even related. She said, Mrs. [?] 'We're not even related!' She said, 'We're not even brother and sister— 'cuz Grace [?] well, she was only 4 years old when she went there, what does she know? But she always called her her mother and the man her father and of course, we had our own father, but kids are known to be polite and call other people aunts or uncles even though they were not really your aunt and uncle, but we didn't wanna call them their first names as children, you know, it didn't sound polite. They had us call them auntie or uncle or something like that even though we were cousins. And we knew that. And when I was at the foster home, my cousin— my last name is DeMoras, and her daughter's name is Moras, and so at school, they'd say, 'how come your name is DeMoras, her name is Moras? They thought maybe they had her or me out of wedlock or something [?] we're just cousins, you know. I'm just there as a foster child. Goes to show you how misunderstandings can get spread around, you know what I'm saying. It's awful. But anyway, that's how it went. But there were cousins— two cousins intermarried in the family, but they were third cousins so that's why they had—. That great grand uncle way back— he dropped the 'de' out of his name— they were all brothers and sisters, but he dropped the 'de' out of his name even though—. In the genealogy that I'm making right now, you'd be surprised how many names have changed, but they're still brothers and sisters, you know what I'm saying, so you have to really know who you're talking about. The son of this one, the son of the mother, the father of this one, you know what I'm saying. That's what you have to do 'cuz they won't know who's who, you know, because the last names have changed in some areas. That one guy that took the 'de' back in his name. His father was Moras, but he took back the name DeMoras, but then his father's Moras, you know what I'm saying! You have to remember who you're talking about. It's very challenging. I find it very challenging.

JM: So, going back a little bit, can you tell me— can you tell me something about what it was like when you were staying here at the Marcotte Home?

(12:37-13:36)GD: Well, we had what you call the [?] they were— they call [?] that means— There was these business people that used to help us with different things. Like, they used to give us

parties or Christmas, they used to give us Christmas presents. They used to get together to help you out and stuff. And so that was nice of them, for business people, you know. And then, one time, I remember going to a lake somewhere. I don't know if it was Bear Pond, or someplace. So, they kinda paid for the afternoon and we were there for, like, swimming and stuff like that. So we had different things going on. And then, sometimes we had a movie, you know. And sometimes they— I remember having one of those. How do you call those? They had these toys. They looked like pinwheels, they call it. You know, they fly in the wind.

JM: Oh, like a windmill?

(13:37-14:54) GD: Yeah, kinda thing. But they were little ones. I forgot the name of those things. Every now and then— I can see it in my head, but I can't think of the name of it. Anyway, they got us those one time. That was cute, I liked that. And then, of course, if anybody brought you candy or something, [?] had a big basket, about his tall— tall as this table here. And they'd put all our names on a bag so every Wednesday we had a treat, you know, they'd give us a couple pieces of candy. You know, our parents gave us, or something. So they gave us a couple pieces or so, and they kept them all in this bag. That was interesting, I liked that. And so we could look forward to having candy. And one year, everytime I had some candy, somebody said, 'can I have some? Can I have some?' Well, you wanted to be friends with others, so you tried to share, you know. Well, they never shared with me, so one day at Christm— Easter time— I don't know who gave me this— but they had a box, it had a rabbit and easter egg and— nobody wanted to share anything with me, so what I did, I hid in the bathroom. I took my feet off the floor because the sisters would check on us all the time— they always followed us everywhere. So I put my feet on the toilet seat and scooped down so they wouldn't see who was there and I ate all my candy right there: hiding in the bathroom. [laughs] The nuns never saw me, they knew I was still here.

[both laugh]

(14:58-17:01) GD: I tell ya, I got to kinda be sneaky sometimes. And, seems to me, I was always the last one to be given a bath on Saturday night. Then, we had to be up around 6 o'clock in the morning for mass 'cuz they had mass around 7 o'clock. I felt I could've stayed in bed another hour or two, you know. But that was the way things were. And if we were sick though, they always had, like another room where— they would say like a mini hospital, you know. But especially when we had the mumps, the measles, or whatever, that's where [?]. And they had us in there, and before you got through, you know, better, they used to give us a bath in epsom salt or something. Not epsom salt— lysol, you know. It was not that much, just a little bit mixed in water. So that was like a disinfectant so you won't pass the germs around. And I remember everybody seemed to have in their hair so they used to comb, you know, give us this— comb us

with some kind of stuff in their hair, you know, to kill all the bugs. Sometimes, they were so infested they had to have their hair cut off and they had to wear special medicine on their head to cure all the scabs they had on their head. Some of them came from very poor families, you know, and they were not very well taken care of. So, and that's all I know because I wasn't-. I remember going to school and Saturday, when they clean the place- clean our room, they had us cut out these- they had a whole pile of the- how do you call? Comics. You know, from the newspapers. And they had us cut out all the comics. And then, we had to put them all together, like the storyline, you know how it goes, the storyline. That was neat, I remember that. That's where I first learned how to cut things out. But when I went to school, I didn't know a word of English. I didn't know what 'yes' meant, and 'no' meant in English. All I knew was French, that's all. And of course, the nuns who taught school were teaching all in English, and I didn't understand what they were saying, so all that year I really didn't learn anything because I didn't know what they were saying. You know, all I knew was French.

JM: So, was everything done in English?

(17:07-18:33) GD: Well, in the classroom it was. Some of the nuns, I'm sure, knew some French, but-. And I know, one time, I heard my brother got hurt bad, and he was about 2 years old at the time, and he was here at the hospital, and when I heard that I cried, and I cried, and I cried, 'cuz the reason was when anyone in my family went to the hospital, always ended up dead, you know what I'm saying, so I thought he was gonna end up dead. And so, the nun said- well, the only way they could get me to stop crying was letting me go to the hospital to see him. And so they finally did, and then I saw him standing in his crib, and I knew he'd be alright, and I felt so much better. But I just had to see him, that's all, just to make sure that he'd be alright. So he's still living. He's off in New York, and he's married now to his second wife because his first wife died. So he's still going. But, at that time, it was so traumatic, 'cuz seemed like everyone we knew died that went to hospitals. Anyway, my mother died at a hospital and my grandfather died here at the nursing home. You know, when it was a nursing home. It's uh- when everybody you love passes away, it's kinda hard to- especially when you're young, you know, because you make attachments to all these people. When you're older, it's still hard, but you can expect it, like you kinda- life is that way, you know what I'm saying. You kinda expect it, but when you're young, you don't think they'll ever go away. You know, you don't want them to go away, that's the thing.

JM: How many- were there a lot of other kids here? How many children were there here?

(18:38) GD: I don't know how many kids there were here. I didn't- you know, at that age, you don't go counting kids when you're 5 years old.

JM: True.

GD: My sister might know.

JM: Were they— were the other kids who were here also from Franco-American—?

(18:52-19:25) GD: When we were here, we were considered babies up to a certain age. 2 years old to 5 or 6, you were considered like in the baby section. And when you were about 7 years old on, you were considered the big girl section so you were upstairs on the other side, so on Sundays, I used to go see my sister upstairs. I knew they were up there and I cried my heart out because I couldn't see them, so finally they let me go upstairs every Sunday to see my sisters. So, because I'm so used to being with the family, I couldn't part with them, you know. I just had to be with them. So they— I don't know how many kids there were either. I don't know if there were 20 or 30. I don't know.

JM: And were most of the kids who were here, were they mostly from French families from Franco-American—

(19:32-20:22) GD: I think so. I think so, because there were a lot of others, in those days, there lived in like Little Canada downtown. But I don't know if they were all from French families. I remember Christmas time— I'll never forget Christmas time— we didn't have no Christmas trees like we used to have at home. There was like a big manger with all the trees all around it. It was so pretty. That's the first time in my life I saw Santa Claus. My mother never made us believe in Santa Claus. She always said if Jesus wanted us to have what we want, he'll give it to us, you know. But that way, we were never disappointed, you know. We just figured Jesus didn't want us to have it right now. Maybe later on, but not now. So, never saw Santa Claus, never knew there was such a person until I came here and saw Santa Claus over here.

JM: They used to have someone come as Santa Claus?

(20:25)GD: Well, one of those guys that was the business people that used to help us with different things, I think that one of them was dressed up as Santa Claus. You know, just to cheer us up, bring some cheer to the place. So that was nice.

JM: Did you have— did you go everyday or just Sundays?

(20:44)GD: I don't remember going everyday, I think we only went on Sundays because those days, you know, we had to go to school and everything. By the time you ate breakfast and all that, you know, we had to go to school.

JM: And what kind of things did you learn in school?

(21:01-23:33) GD: Well, in those days, we had those slates, you know, like little blackboards, and we had the little crayons to go with the blackboard slates. We didn't have paper and pencils. We just had slates that I remember. When I was in the baby grade— baby grade I guess it was. Anyway, then they would learn the alphabet, that sort of thing, that's all I know about learning in school. I don't—. But I remember learning my catechism. Well, learning it was another thing, but all them had these big pictures of Jesus with long hair and long beard and that sort of thing, all dressed in white. Well, I was all in trial over that. Well, one day, to test us to see if we know our catechism, to make our first communion, the Dominican priest from downtown came over. And they wear a habit. They had the white habit, you know, with the black cowl, but he didn't have that. He just had the white habit on. But this priest didn't have a hair on his head and he didn't have any beard at all. And when I saw him— 'cuz he was supposed to interview us to see if we knew our catechism— I did not remember a thing. I saw him and I thought 'wow, is this really Jesus standing in front of me?' [laughs] And I couldn't— it was like everything I ever knew kinda left me. I mean I was wondering 'is he real?' You know, I was in that frame of mind. And, of course, he thought I didn't know my catechisms so I couldn't make my first communion. I was so devastated. Anyway, so finally I said, 'well, maybe I can squeeze in anyway, nobody will see me.' So one day, when they were all lined up for confession, I tried to squeeze in there. Sister saw me and she took me out of there. So I said, 'oh, come on!' Well, anyway, those days we didn't have— we didn't dress in first communion dresses, you know, like the white dress and the veil in all that. They always had us dress— they always made us wear black all the time. I don't know why black made me feel so depressed. And we had these stiff, stiff things— they looked like Clorox bottles, you know what I mean, cut up like arm things and the collar the same way. And they had these big, white, nice bows for first communion to go with the black dress, you know. And so, anyways, when you made the confirmation, they had a big, red bow. The bows changed colors, that was about all that changed. Everything else was the same. Anyway, but that was nice. It was so pretty, I thought it was so nice. But I felt bad. But when I went home, that year I was with my family, that's when I made my first communion over there, back home. So my sister made sure I got to know my catechisms. [laughs] But, she was nice to help me with that. But that's all, there was something else.. But those nuns tried their best with us, you know.

JM: What was the food like? Do you remember?

(23:38-24:54) GD: Well, the food, I'll never forget. I still eat some of them things. You know, those— they call 'em Heath bars. They're like an ice cream bar with chocolate on top, except when we had them, it was all melted. And all the chocolate was molding around. So them times, when the stores couldn't sell them because they were melting, so they'd bring it to us and the nuns would lay it all out, like soup. And I like it just the same even though the ice cream was melted so we ate it just the same. And I remember eating— every Sunday— Seems you could tell the day of the week just by the food we ate. But every Sunday we had cold cuts. And corn— for breakfast it was like corn flakes, and cold cuts for lunch, and something like that. Well, anyway, it got to a point I could not stand eating another corn flake. After that year, I could not see another box of corn flakes. I did not want to touch another corn flake. I think I went 2 years without eating corn flakes 'cuz I was so tired of eating corn flakes every Sunday. It was the same thing. Saturday night was beans. We had beans. One thing I never before, or since, was jell-o. Coffee jell-o. They used to make jell-o out of leftover coffee.

JM: Really?

(24:56-26:00) GD: Yeah. But they'd used unflavored gelatin. So you can make gelatin out of anything. If you use unflavored you can make it out of juices or anything you have, you don't have to buy the jell-o in the package, just get the unflavored thing and you can make jell-o out of anything. Yeah, so that's what they used to have. I haven't had— I keep thinking of it though because it struck me. I never had it after that. 'Cuz that was the only time we had coffee jell-o. Oh yeah, and then we used to have the cream of wheat. Especially when we were sick. And by the time we got the cream of wheat it had the skin on top, you know, because of the milk. Some people didn't like it, but I ate mine anyway 'cuz we had cream of wheat at home so it didn't bother me. Some other people didn't like it. I mean, all you do is stir it up and it's fine, but you know, so. I don't know about anything else too much. Corn! I remember corn just went down my— I lost a tooth and swallowed a tooth along with the corn. 'Cuz we had corn on the cob and I swallowed a tooth. That's all I remember.

JM: Some people were— some of the people I talked to were at the Marcotte Home and talking about everyone having a different— everyone having a number—?

(26:09-27:14) GD: Oh! I was number 6! I was B6! That was the baby section. I was B6. I was the number B6. I remember that one too. 'Cuz we had a little cubby for our clothes. We didn't have a cupboard— like everybody had some kind of bureau. We didn't have bureaus. We just had like a square in the big, big cupboard from— it was real, real tall and everybody had a square-like where they put all your clothes in there. Like your underwear and your socks, you know, things like that. And the dresses were, like, in common use. They had it in the certain room, they called

it [?]. And if your clothes didn't fit into certain clothes anymore, you just went in there, tried on another dress, and that's how it went. 'Cuz sometimes we all grow out of clothes so quickly. Especially when you're kids, you know, you grow out of things so quick. So that's why everybody had kind of a dress that had been passed around depending on how tall you grew and all that. But we basically had our own underwear and socks and things like that. But we grew out of them too.

JM: And did you— other people have said— did you used to call the other kids by their numbers as well? Is that how you used to know each other? Or did you know each other's names?

(27:23) GD: I don't remember that part at all. That part, yeah, I don't know.

J: It might have been a different time.

(27:29-28-59) GD: Well, I remember one thing. One time, it was some kind of holiday, I don't know if it was Christmas or something, but somebody gave me a doll with hair and eyes; a beautiful doll. And I had put it way, way on top of the closet because it was the closet we put all our toys in, you know. And those days we used to climb trees so I could climb on the sides of the closet to put my doll way up there so nobody would take it. And I tell ya, somebody got up there too and took my doll and tore it all apart. The arms, the legs, if they had just played with it and been nice, but they tore it all apart. I thought it was so terrible. Another time, I had like a tracing paper, you know. There was like pictures you could color and trace and all that and crayons and all that and so forth, but they scribbled that all up when I was gone to class— to school, you know. They scribbled the whole thing up. Well, they were just younger kids than I was. After that, I didn't think I wanted anything anymore. It seemed like the more things I had, the more they'd break it, take it apart, you know. It's like no more wishes, you know. [laughs] I had a wishlist, but I forget about it. It's best not to have anything is what I thought. 'Cuz everybody was taking it apart all the time. That's what broke my heart, you know. And then one day, somebody was sick and they said to me, 'can I borrow your slippers?' Somebody gave me a nice pair of slippers. And I supposed they could borrow them, but I never saw them back, so that was another thing that was gone. Things like that that just kinda hurt me.

JM: So, what can you tell me about discipline at the orphanage? Was there a lot of that? Would you say the nuns were strict—?

(29:08-31:27) GD: Well, I remember being spanked one time because somebody was antagonizing me and I happened to— I don't know what I did to them— but anyway, the sister saw me. Didn't hurt me that bad, just the fact that I got spanked, that's all. But, or else, you

were sent to bed early and then deprived or something. So, they had a movie going on and I had to go to bed early. That's about it. So, that's for me, but other people— I know if they wet the bed or something, sometimes they were put in a tub of water and that's it. I guess they didn't realize that some people may have kidney troubles or something. But those days, people were not, the nuns were not— shall I say, educated in medical things, you know what I mean, what could be wrong in a child, like psychology or anything like that. Some of them were just practically kids themselves when they entered the convent. You know, at 16 or 17 years old, what do you know at 17? You know what I'm saying, so therefore, some of them, maybe might have not been doing the right things all the time because they were young and they didn't know the difference. Maybe they just did it how they were raised at home themselves, you know what I'm saying, so they were not taught really to know how to handle kids like us, you know, of different ages, or medical care, or stuff like that that they might not have needed. How to understand a child or what might— could be wrong with a child, or whatever, mentally, psychologically, or whatever. You know, they didn't understand that, so you can't fault them too much because they, you know, they came from families that— they did what they could— what they knew at the time, so. Now, everybody has to go to college and learn how to handle things. In the old days, you could enter the convent practically at— I know one of them said that when a person was 25 years old, they were too old to enter. Come on, I said, that's about the time they could be more profitable to the community 'cuz that time, they been around life and they know what they're doing, and whereas what are they doing? Stealing the crib? [laughs] That's what I told them, getting them out from the crib and putting them in the convent. Good grief. I think that's why there was a lot of bad thing happening because some people said they were beaten up by nuns, or some people said they would hit their fingers with a ruler or whatever. But maybe that's all they knew at the time. So, I can't fault them too much because they didn't know any better. Let's put it that way.

JM: Do you have any particular memories of the nuns while you were there? Like particular nuns? Did you get to know—

(31:36-32:22) GD: No, my sister would have, but I don't. My sister Rosie certainly had. 'Cuz she had to deal with some of them that she didn't like. Well, one particular one anyway. But I didn't know their names and I didn't call any of them actually. Well, the younger one understood me better than some of the older ones because I guess she knew— She's one the younger ones, is the one that helped me go see my brother and helped me go see my sisters upstairs because she understood that I was kind of lonesome and I liked to see them. So she's the one— well, sometimes what they'd do to me— they'd send me to see some older men on the [?] who had no company and they would give me candy, you know. 'Cuz they didn't have no company, so they'd send me to visit some of the older people in the nursing home.

[clicking sounds]

JM: Hold on one second. Let me get my tape here. [mumbling]. Well, we'll use the other recorder, I suppose. Do you remember what her name was?

(32:40) GD: No, I don't. No, I really don't. I know she was the younger one, but I don't know who she was. I was a kid, you know. You don't go by names, you know. You're just there, you know what I'm saying. It's not like if you're older, you kinda notice things more, but when you're just 4 years old, 5 years old, you don't. I don't recall these things so much. But I know my sister Agnes would and my sister Myra would.

JM: So, would you say you had a good time while you were here at the home?

(33:14-34:04) GD: Well, I was very lonesome for my family, I mean beyond that, life wasn't bad. I mean, I wouldn't consider it a bad life, you know. After I went to the foster home, in a way, I wished I was back here. At least you were here with the other kids, you know. Whereas in the foster home it seems like I had to be an adult before my age, you know what I'm saying. You're just kids and here they'd expect you to act like an adult practically. So, in a way I wished I was back here. At least I had other kids to play with and be with. Well, my cousin had a couple kids of her own. One of them was about my age and she had one that was just born, so, but I always had to be like the older sister, you know, but I was the seventh one in my family so I wasn't used to being the older one. [chuckles] Well, anyway, we're disciplined anyway.

JM: Well, when you were with your foster family, did they also speak French?

(34:13-35:02) GD: Oh yeah, they did. Well, when we went to school, that was the only place I learned to speak English was in school. And of course, when we come home we would start speaking English too 'cuz her daughter couldn't understand French because she had gone to the orphanage somewhere else and couldn't understand English so eventually we got to communicate, but anyway. For punishment, my cousin used to make me read those French books, you know, they come from different missions, like [?] and the missions from Africa and all that. They were written in French at the time and anyway, she made me read those. You might say as a punishment and then, after that, I got to enjoy them so much there was no punishment anymore. In fact, I was the one that was reading them 'cuz I enjoyed reading them. So, what they thought was punishment was not punishment for me. So, anyway, I enjoyed doing it.

JM: And your school there in Massachusetts, was that a —?

(35:07-36:47) GD: Well, that was a bilingual school cuz the nuns would come from Canada and they spoke both French and English, so that's when I really learned English because if I said it in French, they'd tell me what it was in English. And so that way, I got to learn better because they were bilingual. Otherwise, on that, I don't think I would've made it in school. In fact, when I went over there in school, they didn't know if I should be in the 1st grade because I didn't know anything about 1st grade work because the nuns over here didn't. I couldn't communicate with them because they taught in English and I only knew French. And so, I didn't get anything out of the 1st grade here. But I made up to it in a way and so I passed all the grades when I was there. I didn't stay back anywhere. So by the time I reached the 8th grade, I was surprised to learn I graduated 4th of my class in 8th grade. That was really a surprise because, you know, some of the kids were smarter than I was. But I won just by a fraction because there were 6 of us that had the same, the same, the same, ending. Those days, it was all numbers. They didn't grade us by A, B, C, it was all numbers, and so I got 86 average, plus a fraction more than others. It was like a horse race where you win by a nose and that's it. But I was surprised because I didn't think I'd get there. I was not good at math or music or art. Those 3 things were not very good for me in school. I'm not into all this— I couldn't understand the math, and even today, that's something else. Maybe some things are alright, but I'm not into it that much. Or music.

JM: So how long did you stay with your foster family for?

(36:52) GD: I was there seven years with them. Until I graduated from the 8th grade. And I graduated on July 17th 1950. And after that I went to my sister's to vacation on the farm and I stayed there with her after that for a couple years.

JM: And where was that?

GD: Huh?

JM: Where was that?

(37:13) GD: Up in Bowdoinham.

JM: Oh, okay.

GD: Up on the farm there in Bowdoinham. Yeah, so she was married by then. So I was up there for a couple years. And so, that's where I went.

JM: So, you didn't go on to high school?

(37:28- 38:25) GD: No, because— I couldn't go to high school because up on the farm there was no way to get anywhere. We were 8 miles from the nearest thing. So, whether it was church or anywhere. Well, we went to church because somebody from downtown came and got us. But my sister's— her husband's sister would come and get us 'cuz they had a car so they'd come and get us, but other than that, there was no way for us to— My brother went to the one room schoolhouse down the road apiece, you know, not far. So, those days they had those one room schoolhouse where they had all these classes in one room. But I couldn't go to high school. I wanted to go to school, I liked going to school. I always enjoyed school, but I couldn't get there. I got my GED years later, but not right then and there, you know; took me awhile. Until I went to California and I got one year of high school down there, but that was it. After that I had— I couldn't go on after that 'cuz I had no sponsor to sponsor me for the other years.

JM: And did you keep in touch with your father during this time?

(38:34-39:16) GD: Oh, yeah. We knew where everybody was. We knew where my other sisters were and my brothers were and all that. You know, like one of my sisters went to live with my aunt Grace and my brother went to live with this lady next-door who was very friendly with my mother. And she took my brother in because she always liked my brother, Johnny. And so, he lived with that family until the B[?], until he got married. He was there 'til 12 years old— ah until he got married. 'Cuz he said after— when he was 12 years old at the boy's orphanage, they had to leave at 12 years old. Where do you go from there? But, anyway he ended up at the— Mrs. Bruscella[?] always liked my brother, John anyway. So she had 2 sons of her own besides, so anyway, he lived there with them until he got married.

JM: And so, did you— so do you think being at the home, or then being at the foster home, do you think it had an effect on your relationship with your father at all?

(39:29-43:22) GD: Well, yeah it did affect the relationship with him because I never really got to know him, you know, really. And you know, I left the house when I was about 5 years old, something like that, and so I didn't really grow up with my brothers and sisters so we were more or less like distant relatives, so we don't really grow up together like you do to develop close relationships, you know what I'm saying. And so I always found it tough because of that. For years and years and years I always miss my family, that's the one thing I— so, 'til one day, when I made a [?] it dawned on me, it's like the grace of God hit me right there. It's like, why am I worried about my family for? Everybody here is my family. You know what I mean? And that kinda closed that thing. But one thing that really did a lot of help I think was, we used to go see Miss B[?] and she was friendly with my mom so I was like we'll go back over her house 'cuz out

house used to be like over there, just across the way, you know, I wished I could go back home and see what the home was like, so one day he called up this lady who owned the place. She said to them, 'we'd like to go visit.' 'Oh yeah, we can go visit,' she said. But come at 7 o'clock, she says. I tell you, it was like a walk back in time. It really was for me, you know. And we looked at the house. It looked pretty much the same as it did when we were there. Except, when she was walking in the house, that lady, I swear, it was almost the same face as my mother had when she died. And she was cooking something. My mother was always cooking something because of her big family anyway. We didn't have money to go buy this, buy that, we had to make it or else, go without it. Well, anyway, she made us zucchini bread, I'll never forget that. And anyway, as I got in the door, it was like I was back home. It was like, as if I had been walking this long trip for 40 years and here I am back home at last. And at the back— 'cuz the kitchen table was a bench, we used to have a bench. She had the bench at the back of the kitchen table. And the stove was like a black iron stove we used to have. Well, this one was like an enamel kind of color. Like green enamel. But right by the stove was this wooden box my grandfather used to put wood in that box to put in the stove. I could've sworn it was the same box. And in the middle of the floor was, like, a braided rug and my grandfather's chair was there all the time. It was as if I had returned back home and the whole time I could see my grandparents there. And my father and my mother. But, anyway, we had a— we was moving around, of course the lady was showing us all the improvements they had made. Of course, it was not rustic, like when we had it. Dad finished the rooms that were not finished yet. Of course, they had more equipment, you know, like stove and refrig— I mean, dryer and washer and all that that we didn't have yet. Anyway, she had— we had a nice talk. We would all get together. She showed us pictures of her family and all that, and we had a very nice evening. Finally, we went back home. And my sister, Ingrid said to me, 'cuz I was vacationing at her house at that point, and she said, 'well, how do you feel about now?' I said, 'now, I feel like I can say goodbye on my own.' You know, I feel like that thread was not put together right. You know what I mean? I just had to go straighten it out, then I took— it was my own decision to leave and be on my own. Now, life goes on, you know what I'm saying. But before that, I always missed that section there. It's like you disappear all of a sudden and you never had the chance to say goodbye. You might say, You know what I mean, it's too soon, you know? You don't have time to— now your own life has taken off and now you gotta go on your own. You know that as you get along in years, but this time it was— I felt like I was just uprooted from there. I didn't have time to say goodbye, or tie things up, you might say before you're leaving. And I felt so much better after that. It felt like— I think everybody would be healing better spiritually if they went back.

JM: And you went back when you were in your 40's you were saying?

(43:27) GD: Yeah, it was my 40's. I say, I felt like I had been walking this long journey for 40 years, and at last I came home. And it was such—. To me, it was a great healing. [long pause] You know, I don't think people should live hating each other because to me, if they only knew how much, how much love is there. [long pause]

JM: Do you wanna take a minute?

[crying] [tape goes silent]

(45:00-46:07) GD: —my father and mother at home again, even though they were not there physically. I don't know why people hate each other. You know, why is there war, why is there [?]. There's so much love out there. And even though my father was the way he was, he loved my mother and he cried his heart out when she passed away. I still remember where I was standing when he came home with the news she passed away. I remember what my sister was talking about. I remember what she said, even. What they were doing. I never forgot it. Ah, I was only like 4 years old at the time. It was a beautiful Saturday. 6 o'clock in the morning he said she passed away. But there was happy memories over there. I always had happy memories of that place. I really did, you know. Other places still had memories, but you know, those were the happiest times of my life.

JM: Did you ever talk to your father about having to go away or anything like that?

(46:15-50:57) GD: Well, yeah. One time— well, he'd sit there and not talk to me for days on end not because he didn't wanna talk to me. I guess he didn't know how to talk to me, you know, sometimes men don't know what to say. You know what I mean? Not that— you know, if I say the wrong thing it might hurt or something. I have so many stories about this guy, some of them are not that good. And I said to him one day, I said to him, 'Dad, can you explain to me what happened?' You know, after mother died, and all that sort of thing, and so he told me what he went through. Poor guy. He said, you know, 'when a woman loses their husband, the state comes and helps with this and that, but a man loses a wife, he's left on his own.' And he said even the friends he had were not really friends anymore 'cuz they always thought he said, 'that he was out to vamp their wife away from their husband, but he said he was not out to vamp anything or anyone, he said he just wanted to be friends. And he said it was tougher for a man than it was for a woman because men are always left out there to sink or swim. You know what I'm saying? And anyway, he went on and on, and I, after that, after we all had a long talk about what happened and all these questions and answers, and all that. And I think we hugged each other and cried our eyes out. You know, because it was such a relief for both of us. 'Cuz now we understand each other as adults. That's why there's such love out there. I mean, he maybe

didn't know how to express himself with loving somebody, but people express themselves different ways. I said, 'Dad, why didn't you come see us when we were in the orphanages?' [?] would've cried my eyes out because he remembers, you know. I don't blame the guy in a way, you know. In those days, men were not supposed to cry. Well, in the Bible, even Jesus cried. So I think men should cry too. Supposed to make you feel better. But it's true. It's wonderful, after I had that talk with my father I felt so much better too, and he felt better too, most likely. You know, and instead of learning to hate each other, we kinda hugged each other and honestly, it was like all these years we didn't hug each other, it felt so great, you know. And so, anyway, when my sister went to get married, she was about 50 years old at the time, [?] before she married Tony, but she said, 'he drinks, he does this, he does that, it reminds me so much of our past lives.' So finally, well, my father liked to have a few beers himself, but doesn't mean he's a total drunk, you know, anyway, everybody thought he was, but what is and what isn't is totally different. Just because a guy has a beer doesn't make him a drunk. This is what I said. So, anyway, finally I said to her, 'go see Dad, have a talk with him. You know, before you get married.' So she did. She came all the way from New York. she said 10 hour drive from New York, I don't know if it was Western part of New York, to come to Maine. She said it was so wonderful to have this talk with Dad too. So, to her, it kinda tied the ends together. And it was so much of a healing too. That's what we need in the world. Healing. You know, all this healing. And so, anyway, things were so different after that. So she got married and they stayed together until they both passed away. But, you know, it's wonderful. People should not just put their parents somewhere and forget about them because, 'oh, they did this to me, that to me.' Okay, so they made mistakes, we all make mistakes. I think just forgoing one another is so much better, you know. So, that's the way I see it. Anyway, life wasn't so bad, and after that, I stayed with my father for a few years and I tried helping him out. But I couldn't be with him all the time 'cuz I had to work in the mill all day. And one day, I came home from work and I was in Massachusetts and I saw blood all over the place, 'Oh, come on, don't tell me somebody murdered him or something.' I had all the shock and coming home. Well, all he had done was fallen down somewhere and he had hurt his head, I guess he had a bloody nose that's why there was—. He wasn't murdered or anything. It was just a bloody nose. I guess just one of those guys that bled a lot. So, anyway, I got that straightened out. But eventually, he went to live with my other sister because she had kids and all that so he was more— with a man, you know, he needed a man in his life, somebody to chum with. He didn't have too many friends, so anyways, that's what he did, went to live with my other sister. So that was better for him. So he lived with her 'til he died. So anyway, we did take our turn helping him out and he didn't go to a nursing home or anything. He stayed home 'til he died. But, after that, well, life went on. So, I moved so many different times in my life, I feel like a nomad. Just pitched a tent somewhere else. But I never thought I'd end up here in my old age after being someplace else all the time. I've lived in so many different places.

JM: And what about your— Can you tell me—did your stay at the Marcotte Home or maybe any of the other things at the foster home or anything like that— do you think that had any affect on your faith, or your relationship with God, or anything like that?

(51:13-54:38) GD: I think it made it stronger, really. 'Cuz, you know, the more turmoils you're in, the more you rely on God because there's nobody else to rely on, really. It's awful to say, maybe, but you should rely on God anytime, but I think when things go wrong, you have to rely on God even more because there was nothing else to do. Because, just like when I took care of my sister, when we moved over here, her husband had put her at a house at [?] when she had a stroke because he wouldn't pay for her bills at the hospital— I mean nursing home, so her son called me up one day, said, 'what am I gonna do?' He's handicapped and so is his wife. I said, 'well, I'll take her here with me.' Well, I wasn't here at the time, I was downtown 'cuz I was [?]. Well, when she had a stroke and had to come to a nursing home, she then couldn't come back home because she couldn't climb stairs or anything. So, we had to come— I had put my name here anyway, so we had found us this room here, so she came to stay with me over here, so I took care of her the best I could 'til she passed away. And so, it was nice to be with her because I hadn't been with her in so many years. And she was very knowledgeable about many, many things. You could talk to her about any subject 'cuz she knew a lot about it. 'Cuz she was very good. 'Cuz she was the one that cured my arm when I was a kid, I fell on the big, big, pot— you know the belly stove, the old wood stoves, and I burned my arm. And she cured my arm. See, my arm, right up here. There's a little— it looks like I have a birthmark, but she did— she put a cloth and olive oil and wrapped my arm with it. She didn't put it on me, she put it on the cloth and it healed it from the inside out. But I never had scars. But I don't have that strength in my arm like I would have. But she was good at healing even when we were kids. She was 13 years old and healing people from different things. My brother stepped in— and I— we stepped in a beehive— one time, both of us. In tall grass, about as tall as us, you know, kids running around in tall grass. We both ended up in a beehive. And boy, did they come after us. He was bitten badly, and she stripped him down to nothing practically, just down to his underwear, and put mud all over him. She said that's one way of healing it. So my father and grandfather used to lumberjack work in the woods and they learned all these things from the Indians, the Native Americans, working with them in the woods. So, that's how they learned to do these things. You know, to cure people with different herbs. And so, they talk about it home and she was very smart, so she picked up on all these things and learned to do all these things just from hearing them talk about it. Yeah. And she got to learn how to make dandelion wine out of dandelions. Dandelions are not bad, you know, they're a diuretic, they're a medicine. And also, the leaves are good to eat like a salad, if you cut them young. And the flowers, not the green part, but just the flowers are good too. And [?]. I used to take the flowers and put them in my pancakes, they were good.

I'm still here to talk about it. But the flowers are good to eat. She says, one day, 'the ducks ate all our dandelions so she didn't have any left to make any wine.' Even the ducks liked the dandelions. So I don't know why people kill them all. Even the roots, you can make a coffee substitute. You dry it up, you know, the roots, and make a coffee substitute out of the roots. So, I mean, all these things are good to know. You never know, one day you'll be hungry and want to eat something. Well, anyway,

JM: Well, I think that's the end of my list of questions. Did you have anything else you wanted to add?

GD: No, what else would you want to know?

(54:48) JM: Well, just seeing if you had anything else you remembered about the Marcotte Home, especially anything else about your childhood that you wanted to add that I didn't ask you yet?

GD: No, that's all I know.

JM: Alright, great. Well, thank you. I think there's a lot of good material for us here. Thank you.